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The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the Government of Ethiopia's continued detention of independent Ethiopian journalist and blogger Eskinder Nega a violation of international law. The panel of five independent experts from four continents held that the government violated Mr. Nega's rights to free expression and due process. The UN Working Group called for his immediate release. Mr. Nega is serving an 18-year prison sentence on terror and treason charges in response to his online articles and public speeches about the Arab Spring and the possible impact of such movements on the political situation in Ethiopia. (Bikyanews.com, April 1).

The prosecution of 29 Muslim protest leaders and others charged under Ethiopia's deeply flawed antiterrorism law raises serious fair trial concerns. The trial was scheduled to resume in Addis Ababa on April 2, 2013, after a 40-day postponement. Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the case has already had major due process problems. Some defendants have alleged been ill-treatment in pre-trial detention. The government has provided defendants limited access to legal counsel and has taken actions that undermined their presumption of innocence. Since Jan. 22, the High Court has closed the hearings to the public, including the media, diplomats, and family members of defendants (HRW press release, April 1).

The Meles Zenawi Foundation was officially established on April 6, 2013. The event was launched with a moment of silence in memory of the late PM Meles Zenawi. Present on the occasion were representatives of Nations and Nationalities of Ethiopia, senior government officials, African leaders, families of the late Meles Zenawi and invited guests. The Foundation will serve as a living center of ideas and programs to further advance the works and legacy of the great leader Meles Zenawi. It will also serve as his final resting place and a site for scholarship (WIC, April 6).

Nine country elders who had petitioned the Prime Minister over issues related to development and indentify matters have been arrested. The elders earlier submitted similar appeals to local officials raising 22 questions related to their national identity and development issues. Having failed to obtain any response, they later petitioned the former prime minister and the House of the Federation but no reply was obtained. Recently, they submitted the same appeal to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and returned without any reply. Two weeks ago, the same elders were put in police custody for persisting in their demands (Sendek, April 3).

The leader of the veteran Oromo Liberation Front, Lencho Leta, and his supporters have formed a new political party. The new party called the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) said it has the same objectives as the other movements in Ethiopia. The new party pledged to conduct its struggle in cooperation with other Ethiopian political parties. The ODF leaders said they have dropped their previous secessionist demands. The party ODF says the Oromo people's quest for economic growth and security is no different from that of the Ethiopian people. It made a call to other parties to work together with ODF. ODF believes that currently pressure, oppression, exclusion, violation of the right to religious freedom, oppression of nationalities have continued in a strengthened manner. Hence, it said, the need to establish a new party to conduct a struggle alongside other parties (Yegna Press, April 2).

Farms were bought from government for 1.1bio birr (\$59.4m), General Manager of Horizon Plantations Ethiopia Jemal Ahmed tells reporters in Addis Ababa. The farms are Upper Awash Agro Industry Enterprise, Gojeb Agricultural Development Enterprise and Coffee Processing and Warehouse Enterprise Jemal. 400m birr to be invested over 2 yrs to double production to 50,000 MT in Upper Awash, country's largest orange grower. Ethiopian-born Saudi citizen Mohammed al-Amoudi is majority owner of Horizon Plantations Ethiopia. Through his Midroc Ethiopia Group Al-Amoudi is single largest investor in Ethiopia and his current net worth is estimated at \$10.4bio, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index (Bikya.news, March 31).

Transport Minister Diriba Kuma disclosed that the nationwide railway project is in a serious financial crisis. In a report he presented to the House of People's Representatives, Minister Diriba said the railway project is one of the grand projects planned to be carried out in the five year Growth and Transformation

Plan. He said that out of the planned railway network, only the light railway project in Addis Ababa and the Addis Ababa-Mieso-Djibouti line are being successfully carried out. The nationwide railway network will have a total mileage of 4.744 km (Reporter, April 3).

It is a struggle to feed a growing family on land that is subject to droughts and soil erosion. But for Ethiopian smallholder farmers like Abebe Moliso, that's exactly the challenge that life has given them. A land management program called MERET is helping them deal with it. AWASSA-Abebe Moliso, a farmer living in a small village near the southern Ethiopian town of Awassa, still remembers the days before he was introduced to a joint conservation and water harvesting project known as MERET, or the Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to more sustainable livelihoods program, which is supported by the Ethiopian government and WFP, (WFP release, April 4)

Ethiopia and the World Bank have signed an agreement providing for 120m USD for the implementation of Health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Finance and Economic Development Minister Sufian Ahmed said that of the total finance from the World Bank, 100m USD is in the form of loan while the remaining 20m is in the form of grant. The purpose of the Health MDGs Support Programme is to improve the delivery and use of comprehensive package of maternal and children health services to accelerate progress towards achieving health MDGs and relevant GTP goals. The programme uses the Bank's new Programme for Results (PforR) financial instrument which is designed to support countries to plan and execute their own development programmes. World Bank Ethiopia Country Director Guang Zhe Chen stated that the project is for 120m USD out of which 100m USD zero-interest credit will be disbursed over the next four years upon registering specific achievements (WIC, March 30).